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ABSTRACT

This report describes the activities of the UNISIST program, the component of the Unesco General Information Program which is concerned with education and training for information professionals and users of information services in developing nations. It focuses on five fields: (1) the coordination of educational and training activities: (2) the organization of international and regional training courses, seminars, and workshops: (3) the preparation of teaching materials, handbooks, and guidelines: (4) the promotion of user education in member states: and (5) assistance to the establishment and development of national and regional schools or training programs. (FM)

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EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF INFORMATION SPECIALISTS AND USERS--THE UNISIST EXPERIENCE

by

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EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF INFORMATION SPECIALISTS AND USERS – THE UNISIST EXPERIENCE

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The General Information Programme of Unesco created in February 1977, regroups most of the activities so far executed under the Division of Scientific and Technological Documentation and Information, responsible for implementing the UNISIST Programme and under the Division for Documentation, Libraries and Archives concerned in recent years with developing the NATIS concept.

For the period 1977-1982 the activities of the General Information Programme are integrated under four sub-objectives: 1) promoting the formulation of policies and plans; 2) promoting the establishment and application of methods and norms; 3) contributing to the development of informatica infrastructures and to the application of modern techniques of data collection, processing, transfer and reproduction and 4) promoting the training and education of information specialists and users.

Both the Intergovernmental Council and the Advisory Committee for the General Information Programme recognized the major importance, in particular for developing countries, of the education and training component of the General Information Programme and recommended that high priority be given to this area of activity.

The following main fields of education and training activities are described in some detail:

1. Harmonization and co-ordination of education and training activities;

2. Organization of international and regional training courses, seminars and workshops;

3. Preparation of teaching materials, handbooks, guidelines;

4. Promotion of user education in Member States;

5. Assistance to the establihment and development of national and regional schools or training programmes.

The General Conference of Unesco decided, at its 19th session in Nairobi in November 1976, to reorganize the activities previously assigned to the two programme sections dealing with "Scientific and Technological Documentation and Information" responsible for carrying out the UNISIST Programme, on the one hand, and with "Documentation, Libraries and Archives" concerned in recent years with developing the NATIS or national information systems concept, on the other hand.

The implementation of that decision led to a change of structure in the Unesco Secretariat. In February 1977, the Director-General created the Division of the General Information Programme regrouping most of the activities so far executed under the two programme sections just mentioned and placed in outside the sectoral structure directly under Unesco's Directorate.

As a result, the General Information Programme basically covers all the activities of the Organization in the fields of scientific and technological information and documentation, libraries and archives. An Intergovernmental Council, composed of 30 Member States, was created by the General Conference for supervising the planning and implementation of the General Information Programme in the interest of the development of education, culture, science and technology in order to encourage co-operation between Member States in this consolidated programme, to ensure the continuity of the UNISIST Programme, and to promote the concept of planning national information systems (NATIS). The Intergovernmental Council held its first session in November of last year.

Moreover, the Director General set up an Advisory Committee of experts and specialists in the disciplines and professions concerned to assess the changing requirements and trends of the world's user communities in respect of information and also to advise the Director General and assist him in evaluating the relevance and adequacy of Unesco's information programme performance in relation to these needs and trends. This Advisory Committee held its first session in October 1977.

For the period 1977-1982, the activities of the General Information Programme, encompassing support for documentation, libraries and archives, are integrated under four sub-objectives: 1) promoting the formulation of policies and plans, 2) promoting the establishment and application of methods and norms, 3) contributing to the development of information infrastructures and to the application of modern techniques of data collection, processing, transfer and reproduction, and 4) promoting the training and education of information specialists and information users.

Both the Intergovernmental Council and the Advisory Committee recognized the major importance, in particular for developing countries, of the education and training component in the General Information Programme of Unesco, and recommended in consequence that high priority continue to be given to the corresponding sub-objective.

This being said, the purpose of this paper is to provide participantes in this Conference with more detailed information about our programme concerning the education and training of information specialists and users.

First of all, the General Conferences, at its 19th session in November 1976, allocated nearly 20% of the Regular Budget funds available for programme activities in 1977-78 to training and education. In fact, a somewhat larger percentage is being devoted to training, since some activities in this field, including a portion of those approved under the Participation Programme are financed from other parts of the Regular Programme. Other training activities, some of considerable size, are financed from sources outside the Organization's Regular Budget, including the United Nations Development Programme.

The Programme on education and training of information professionals and users is meant as a contribution to raising the level of preparation and performance of information personnel, broadly defined to include information specialists, documentalists, librarians and archivists, and also as an incentive to developing programmes for the education of information users. Thus it will contribute to the building up, in Member States or in small homogenous regions, of such basic facilities as may be needed for the professional education and training of information personnel and the provision of teachers and teaching materials required in the relevant institutions.

In view of the urgent need which exists while national and regional training institutions are being developed, international and regional courses, mostly of short duration, are being organized in order to update and deepen the professional preparation of managers of information services and specialists in various branches of information work.

The principal areas of action are as follows:

- to develop a long range policy and plan of action in the field of education and training of information personnel;
- to contribute to harmonizing and coordinating the ongoing education and training activities of United Nations agencies, in international governmental and non-governmental organizations and institutions;
- to assist in the establishment and development of national and regional schools for training information specialists of kinds;
- to prepare teaching staff for such shools and for training programmes for the information of scientists, documentalists, librarians and archivists;
- to contribute to the preparation of teaching materials for these disciplines;
- to organize at different levels international and regional courses stressing the organization of activities for teachers, managers of information systems and services and specialists in the various branches of the information field;
- to promote user education in Member States.

In organizing these activities there has been an effort to stress the use of Unesco's funds are "seed money" which, supplemented with contributions from other sponsors, is likely to have a multiplier effect.

This paper has deliberately selected five main areas of activities from the various fields of our education and training programme, namely:

1) Harmonization and co-ordination of education and training activities;

2) Organization of international and regional training courses, seminars and workshops;

3) Preparation of teaching materials, handbooks, guidelines;

4) Promotion of user education in Member States;

5) Assistance to the establishment and development of national and regional schools or training programmes.

1) HARMONIZATION OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES

It has been repeatedly suggested that Unesco should provide the forum through which the organizations concerned can identify, harmonize and coordinate national and international assistance programmes in the training and education of information specialists. The workplan for the current biennium (1977-78) includes provision for a meeting of sponsors of international training programmes including United Nations agencies, governmental and intergovernmental bodies and organizations. The purpose of that meeting, to be held in June this year, is to develop a long-term plan of action towards harmonizing on-going national and international assistance programmes in training and education for specialized information personnel. The initiative for this project goes back to 1972 when an Ad Hoc Working Group on Information Requirements of Developing countries recommended that Unesco should promote the coordination of such international efforts. The urgent need for harmonization was again emphasized by the UNISIST Steering and Advisory Committees at their first and second sessions.

As another example of activities in this field, arrangements have been made with the FID Secretariat for the preparation of a "Newsletter on Education and Training for specialized information personnel". An experimental issue, succinctly describing significant developments in education and training in the area of information science, documentation, libraries and archives, appeared as a supplement to the FID News Bulletin of November 1977. It was circulated for evaluation to a number of experts and relevant institutions.

The need for such a newsletter as a tool for coordination and harmonization of efforts had been identified and stressed by various meetings including those of the UNISIST Steering and Advisory Committees. The active cooperation of United Nations agencies, international governmental or non-governmental organization, foundations regional and national training institutions and other bodies is still being sought. If the experimental issue published in November 1977 proves valuable, it is envisaged to continue the publication with four further issues during the present year.

2) ORGANIZATION OF INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL TRAINING COURSES, SEMINARS AND WORKSHOPS

While the long-term goal is undoubtedly to assist in building up, in individual Member States or at least in small homogeneous regions, the basic facilities needed for the professional education and training of information personnel, it is quite obvious that in the short-term, there is an urgent need for access on the part of a great many Member States to facilities outside the national or even regional boundaries, either for basic, professional courses or for short courses for updating or specialization of knowledge.

A variety of courses, seminars and workshops –in terms of level, content, duration, language of instruction and location– is, therefore, being offered every year in collaboration with appropriate international, regional or national organizations. These training activities usually deal with such precisely defined subjects as indexing, information storage and retrieval, resource sharing, application of standards, administration of information services, handling of experimental data, etc. They are aimed at specific audiences particular teachers, managers of various types of information services and specialists in the various branches of the profession.

As it would be too long to enumerate all the courses we have organized so far, it might suffice to single out a few representative activities provided for under our 1977/78 programme.

a) An International Seminar for Managers of Library and Information Services was organized in Ankara, Turkey, in June 1977.

   This was the third in a series of seminars for managers. Like its predecessors held in Mexico (1975) and in the Philippines (1976), it attempted to convey the basic knowledge, skills and methods of administration as developed for business, industry and public administration to

those who now hold or will shortly be called upon to hold senior administrative responsibilities in information organizations of all kinds. The programme of this Ankara seminar was developed from the experience gained with the Library Administrators Development Programme of the College of Library and Information Services, University of Maryland, USA, and the two Unesco-sponsored seminars mentioned above.

b) The Fourth Post-graduate scientific information and documentation course is currently being given from October 1977 to July 1978 by the French National Commission in collaboration with Unesco.

The main purpose of those courses, which take place every year, is to train skilled high level personnel specializing in information and documentation processing and conversant with modern data-processing techniques in an advanced course extending over a full academic year, i.e. some nine months.

c) An International Institute on General Systems and Information Networks was organized from June to September 1977, in Los Angeles, California, USA, by Unesco, UNITAR, the Society for General Systems Research and the Faculty of Information Science at UCLA for participants from developing countries selected from among directors or managers of information systems and networks, decision-makers or planners, educators in the fields of activity covered or graduate students in these areas. The programme included courses in General Systems and Information, Information Networks, Information Retrieval Systems and gave special attention to International Systems and Networks.

d) An International Summer School for Teachers and Workers in the information Field, is to be organized in July 1978 by the Postgraduate School of Librarianship and Information Science, University of Sheffield, U.K. Similar courses were previously given in Sheffield already (1975) and in Paris (1976) and two more are being planned to take place in 1979 in Mexico and Austria.

e) Two regional courses in administration for managers of information systems and services will be held this year; one in Senegal for participants from African countries and Arab States having French as vehicular language and the other in Ghana for participants from English-speaking African countries.

f) Finally, an international seminar on indexing will be held next August in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in collaboration with the "Centro Argentino de Información Científica y Tecnológica (CAICYT)" for participants from Spanish-speaking countries.

3) PREPARATION OF TEACHING MATERIALS, HANDBOOKS, GUIDELINES

In order to help organizers of training courses plan their activities successfully and improve them through evaluation, two sets of guidelines were issued in 1975, one on the Organization of training courses, and the other on the Evaluation of training courses. Both guidelines are intensively used for our various training activities. They exist in English, French and Spanish and are available upon request from Unesco.

A more recent document is an outline for a "Course in Administration for Managers of Information Services" which has already been used extensively for the before-mentioned courses in Mexico, the Philippines and Turkey and which will be used again for those to be held this year in Senegal and Ghana.

This document identifies key elements for workshops designed to develop management skills of those at present holding or about to hold shortly senior administrative responsibility in information institutions of all types. The English version is already available and French and Spanish adaptations are under preparation.

In addition to these very practically oriented guidelines, a set of two documents of a more theoretical nature is under preparation:

(a) "Guidelines on Curriculum Development in Information Studies" meant to help institutions in developing countries to set up curricula for basic courses; b) "Guidelines for Policy on Information Manpower Development and Forecasting" aimed at helping Member States to formulate and adopt a future-oriented national policy in the field of education and training of information personnel and also to forecast their information manpower needs.

Both documents will be available in English by the end of this year and arrangements are being made to have them issued in French and Spanish at a later date.

Two more publications might deserve mentioning at this stage :

(a) the "Handbook for Information Systems and Services" which offers a broad introduction to the field, including questions of information policy and planning, management and organization of information systems and services, procedures and methods, standardization, facilities and equipment and training aspects. Intended for experienced information workers and managers of information systems and services in developing countries who require a concise presentation of the basic concepts, objectives and functions of information services, it can also be of great help to students for whose benefit it brings together in concise fashion the concepts and prevailing practices concerning the planning and functioning of information systems and services. The Handbook is available in both English and French and a Spanish version will be issued within a few months.

(b) The UNISIST Guide for Teachers entitled "Education and Training of Users of Scientific and Technical Information", which may serve for preparing training programmes both in the form of a basic education course for students at university level and as a training workshop for practitioners. It provides information based on the knowledge of the current state-of-the-art of teaching information retrieval to scientists and technologists. This information includes a methodology as well as course content believed to be effective in most situations and for users with different backgrounds. It has particular application to circumstances in developing countries. The Guide is available in both English and French and a Spanish version is in preparation.

Before closing this section on teaching materials and guidelines, special mention should be made of a training package, at present being developed in collaboration with FAO and IAEA, to be used as a general orientation course for people engaged or shortly to be engaged in information work without any previous formal training. The training package will be used in workshops organized at national documentation centres, for general introductory courses in library/information schools for on-the-job trainees and in orientation courses and specialized seminars, such as those organized by FAO (AGRIS), IAEA (INIS), UNIDO and Unesco. The objective is to provide general basic concepts in information work to allow participants to have a general overview of the field and to be better prepared to understand specific aspects of information handling. While aimed at preparing the information personnel engaged in a given information system or service to perform their functions better, this general orientation material should not be considered to make up for or replace the formal education needed in the field of information. The training package is expected to be available in English and French by the end of this year.

Future Unesco plans call for support to various professional groups and institutions for comparative studies concerning the suitability of existing curricula and/or texts for the study in developing countries of information science, documentation, librarianship and archival studies. Assistance will be given to encourage the preparation of improved curricula and syllabi in various branches of information studies stressing adhesion to international norms but adapted as appropriate to local or regional conditions and taking into account users' needs. Work on the translation or adaptation or certain important existing materials into new languages will be encouraged and the preparation of a number of manuals and teaching packages in special subject areas, stressing the usefulness of innovative teaching techniques will be undertaken.

4) PROMOTION OF USER EDUCATION IN MEMBER STATES

The issues related to the user of information are fundamental to all aspects and considerations regarding the storage, processing, dissemination and utilization of information. The final goal of an intergovernmental programme, such as the UNISIST Programme, is to serve the final user of information, since the latter is the "raison d'être" of the whole machinery of information systems, services, networks and programmes.

In the previous biennium (1975/76) the UNISIST programme paid special attention to the issue of user training. Two seminars were organized on this topic, one in Bangkok for Asia, and one in Rome of a more international character. The reports of these meetings area available from Unesco on request. They cover aspects such as user training as a key issue of national information policy, levels or user training, special problems in academic user education programmes, the investigation of user needs and information-seeking behaviour as a basis for user training programmes.

A second type of action undertaken by Unesco is the publication of guidelines and instructional material, such as the "Education and Training of Users of Scientific and Technical Information –UNISIST

Guide for Teachers" already mentioned above. A third type of action has been the promotion and organization or workshops for the training of users in Unesco Member States.

The area of user needs and user training and education will continue to receive attention in Unesco's General Information Programme, under which a number of specific projects and activities will be undertaken, in collaboration with appropriate non-governmental organizations.

5) ASSISTANCE TO THE ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL AND REGIONAL SCHOOLS OR TRAINING PROGRAMMES

As mentioned earlier, training activities of a considerable size are financed under the Participation Programme for assistance to Unesco Member States upon request, as well as from sources outside the Regular Budget of Unesco – e.g. UNDP.

During each biennium, a substantial part of the funds made available to Member States under the Participation Programme for the developmetn of their national documentation, library and archives infrastructure is used for financing fellowships, in the current biennium 29 such fellowships are foreseen for training in the fields of scientific and technical information and documentation, libaries and archives. Provision is also made under the Participation Programme in the form of short-term expert services for such purposes as planning and establishing national and regional training facilities, for forecasting manpower requirements through surveys of the supply and demand for information workers and for advising on the revision of training programmes for documentalists, librarians or archivists.

Among the many activities financed by UNDP, three major ones are carried out in Morocco, Ghana and the Philippines:

- In Morocco, a large project was set up in Rabat to meet an urgent need for training librarians and documentalists in the country. A total of over US$ 1,000,000 was made available by UNDP for the establishment of a School of Information Science and during 1977 the teaching staff consisted of five foreign experts and short term consultants functioning as teachers in specialized subject areas. In addition, local counterparts are receiving training abroad towards professional librarianship and information science degree and will ultimately replace these foreign experts. Over 100 students are already attending the courses;

- In Ghana, a Regional Training Centre for Archivists is being set up within the well-established School of Librarianship of the country. Two experts together with one Ghanaian archivist function as professors at the School in which enrolment is open to archivists from English-speaking African countries.

- In the framework of a large-scale UNDP project for the establishment of a Regional Information Network for Science and Technology for South-East Asia, support is being given for the development of a nine-month post-graduate training course in information science at the University of the Philippines. This regional programme leading to a diploma is aimed at training B.S. graduates (in Library Science, Engineering or Science) to become information specialists; it will give a broad overview in information handling, including indexing, storage, retrieval, search strategy, programming, systems analysis, etc.

As usual in implementing the various parts of its programme, Unesco is working in close liaison and co-operation with its own Member States, with other United Nations Agencies, as well as with relevant non-governmental organizations, among which FID, IFLA and ICA rank foremost.

To conclude, I would like to indicate that this part of the Unesco programme –the education and training of information personnel– is expected to be maintained at its top priority level in the years to come. And my sincerest hope is that the Member States and relevant organizations active in this part of the world will continue to be interested in collaborating with Unesco in this most promising field of action.